

**RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
SCHOOL PERFORMANCE CATEGORIES  
FACE-TO-FACE MEETING REPORT**

**PROVIDENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

June 9, 2002

**Overview**

Face-to-Face Meetings between the Providence School Department (PSD) and the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) were conducted during April and May 2002 as an outgrowth of the categorization of schools in February as "low performing." As in all districts statewide, the Face-to-Face Meetings in Providence were designed to include representatives of the PSD administration, the Providence School Board (Board) and the Providence Teachers' Union (PTU), as well as building-based teams from the "low performing" schools themselves. Face-to-Face Meetings are required for all districts that contain schools identified as "low performing" based upon four years of student assessment data.

The Face-to-Face Meetings with the PSD were held in the context of two prior years of intensive interaction between RIDE and the PSD. RIDE and the PSD have been engaged in an intervention process flowing from the Providence Compact during the 2001-2002 school year (a cooperative agreement between the State and the District for the implementation of structured reform activities in the PSD) and the ongoing implementation of Progressive Support and Intervention, pursuant to Article 31, during the 2002-2003 school year.

The Face-to-Face Meetings held with all school districts statewide that contain schools designated as "low performing" constitutes a next step in the ongoing process of accountability for school improvement entitled Progressive Support and Intervention. The accountability process is designed to allow the school district to address its capacity to engage in the four core processes of school improvement: self-study, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The meeting report is a public recitation of the steps, required by RIDE, to be taken in the district to increase student achievement in English- language arts (ELA) and mathematics over the ensuing year.

Face-to-Face Meetings for many school districts that contain fewer than ten schools designated as "low performing" were held in single or double sessions, providing RIDE with the opportunity to meet with both central school-department administrators and school-building administrators and teams from the designated schools. Because Providence is our largest school district and contains the

greatest number of schools, the Providence Face-to-Face Meetings have been structured into several phases: Phase 1: District Level Meetings (conducted during April) to frame the district-wide issues confronting Providence's "low-performing" schools; Phase 2: Face-to-Face Meetings (conducted during May) with the three large comprehensive high schools designated as "low performing" (Central, Hope, and Mount Pleasant) and with the three "small" high schools, some of which do not yet have four years of data with which to be categorized (ALP, Feinstein, and Providence Place Academy); Phase 3: Additional meetings and discussions (to be conducted during the summer) with the PSD, Board, and PTU regarding issues confronting the middle and elementary schools categorized as "low performing" in Providence.

Each school that has been categorized as "low performing" across the state faces unique issues and challenges and thus will be met with a differentiated approach by RIDE in terms of specific recommendations and requirements for improvement. The RIDE approach to each school is predicated upon: student-performance data; SALT survey results; discipline, dropout, and attendance data; SALT visit reports (when available); school-improvement plans; special-education support visit reports; district strategic plans; and information gathered from the schools directly through the Face-to-Face process. Although each school is different, and differentiated approaches are necessary, there are also common themes that emerge among "low-performing" schools in Providence and across the state. This report will address both some of the crosscutting themes and the unique challenges facing the three Providence comprehensive high schools. A report that addresses the specific challenges facing the small high schools will follow, as will a report regarding middle and elementary schools upon the completion of Phase 3 described above.

**Participants from Providence:** Diana Lam, Superintendent; Susan Lusi, Chief of Staff; Sam Zurier, School Board representative; Phil DeCecco, President, Providence Teacher's Union and Joseph Almagno, Executive Secretary, Providence Teachers Union; Principal Nancy Mullen and members of the Mount Pleasant community; Principal Harry Potter and members of the Hope High School community; Principal Deb DiCarlo and members from the Central High School community; Principal Jose Aleman and members of the Alternate Learning Project community; Principal Nancy Owen and members of the Feinstein High School community; and Principal Donald Pastine and members of the Providence Place Academy School at the Mall community.

**Participants from RIDE:** Peter McWalters, Commissioner; Jennifer L. Wood, Chief of Staff/Chief Legal Counsel; David V. Abbott, Esq., Assistant Commissioner; Ken Fish, Director, Office of School Improvement and Accountability; Sally Radford, Office of Special Needs; Mathies Santos, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, Office of Equity and Access; Marvin Abney, Office of School Improvement and Accountability; Peg Votta, Office of

School Improvement and Accountability; Andrea Casteñeda, Office of School Improvement and Accountability; Janet Carroll, Office of Instruction.

### **RIDE Issues for Discussion and Examination**

At each Face-to-Face Meeting the Commissioner provided the participants with an overview of the issues that would need to be addressed at the district and school level. For the district as a whole, the issues include:

- Instructional focus on literacy and numeracy
- Analysis of student performance
- Site-based systems (how is the district organizing schools around student instructional needs?)
- School leadership issues (principal development, leadership development, development of instructional leaders in schools)

In preparing for the Face-to-Face Meetings and in preparing this report, RIDE has relied upon various sources of information, including but not limited to: student assessment results; SALT survey results; examination of the “Rekindling the Dream” district strategic plan; SALT visit reports; information gathered through our Compact and Progressive Support and Intervention work over the past two years; information gathered by the RIDE Field Service Teams as well as the School Support Visit special education monitoring process; and dropout, attendance, and discipline data.

Issues of particular concern for discussion with the Providence high schools include:

- Results: is there evidence of progress in student assessment results, student attendance, SALT survey responses, dropout prevention, student discipline-report reduction, and other key indicators?
- Program: is there a standards-based curriculum in place and are teachers in each school organizing their instruction around this? Do teachers, students, and parents understand the standards-based instructional approach and the curriculum?
- Differentiated response to student instructional needs: are students with literacy delays being responded to in the instructional program? Is there a ramp-up program for entering ninth graders who are functioning below grade level?
- Personalization: Are the schools reorganizing into small schools or school teams in which all students are well known to adults? Is someone monitoring the students' progress? Are teachers organized into working groups around student instructional needs?

- Time on task: Is time organized to provide for teacher professional development, common planning of instructional strategies, and development and implementation of standards-based curriculum?

### **Providence Responds to the School Groupings**

Representatives from Providence were given the opportunity to respond to the impact of the school-performance categories in the district and to describe current school-improvement efforts. At the district level, RIDE heard from PSD, PTU and Board representatives, each with a perspective on how the school categorization affects the ongoing improvement effort in Providence.

Common reactions:

- The assessment results and concomitant school categorization were not a surprise to anyone who had been monitoring assessment data in *Infoworks* over the past four years.
- There is evidence that the elementary schools, where focus has been brought to literacy and numeracy standards-based instruction over a period of years, have shown real signs of progress (e.g., largest proportion of improving schools).
- There is evidence that the middle schools need to engage in an overall redesign effort such as that underway in the high schools.
- The high schools are just beginning to show the impact of the overall redesign effort and these efforts are on the right track, although it is too soon to see that in the assessment results.

The Board emphasized the need for RIDE to build consensus throughout all Providence Public Schools constituencies that the primary focus of all education efforts must be student achievement. High academic expectations and a universal focus on student achievement must be a consensus focus.

The PTU focused on some of the positive aspects of the additional professional development opportunities and other resources that have begun to gain some foothold in the system. The PTU representative also cautioned that the many issues that Providence students face outside of school sometimes create profound challenges to schools in terms of reaching students to improve student achievement.

### **RIDE Requirements for District-Wide Improvements**

#### ***Evidence of Improvement***

*Providence representatives (the PSD, Board, and PTU) are collectively responsible for showing evidence of preliminary “indicators of readiness” at the high school and middle school level, much like those that are currently demonstrable at the elementary level.*

It is not realistic to expect PSD to have posted dramatic increases in state assessment results across all grade levels given the relatively short time frame of the reform efforts of last two-and-a-half years. However, RIDE *does* require that all levels of PSD schools show at least preliminary indicators of future gains:

- High-quality professional development;
- High-quality discussion in the schools of standards-based instructional strategies;
- Strategic vision for Providence schools

The current lack of evidence of conditions of readiness in some high schools (discussed more fully below) reflects a lack of penetration of the investment of time and money at the classroom level. Many activities and strategies are still just beginning to penetrate to the level where students and teachers in the classroom can benefit from their impact. This is a significant concern in light of the requirement for dramatic improvement in student achievement on the statewide assessments within the two years, as required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002.

The rigorous requirements of both Article 31 and current federal law mean that penetration of standards-based instruction to the classroom level is a critical requirement that RIDE will hold Providence accountable for during this annual cycle of Progressive Support and Intervention. This means that PSD teachers must have meaningful professional-development plans and the PSD, Board, and PTU are collectively responsible for ensuring that PSD teachers have both the opportunity for participation in professional development and in fact participate in professional development focused on standards-based instruction.

### ***Alignment Between Mission, Planning, and Budgeting***

*The PSD must prepare a Consolidated Resource Plan (fiscal plan) in a continuous process that is aligned to the strategic plan submitted annually to RIDE.*

PSD must map a plan for improvement of student achievement as part of the aligned submission of annually updated strategic-planning and financial-planning tools. This includes presentation of evidence that a standards-based curriculum is in place in the district at all levels (elementary, middle, and high) and that the instructional practices are in place to effectively deliver this curriculum to students. RIDE will work with Providence to examine the alignment between the

district strategic plan and school- improvement plans. There is a mutual recognition of the need for Providence (collectively the PSD, Board, and PTU) to move forward with the high school redesign already underway and to expand that effort in a focused way to include middle school redesign.

### ***Emphasis on Student Achievement***

*Providence (PSD, Board, and PTU) must collectively change those structures that are not supportive of improved student achievement.*

During this Progressive Support and Intervention cycle, RIDE must see evidence that the shift Providence has made to a targeted focus on the literacy and numeracy of the student population is both continuing and gaining deeper penetration. In light of the challenges faced by the student population in Providence including high mobility rates and high incidence of poverty, an intensive focus on school restructuring to support student instructional need will be required by RIDE. The data gathered by RIDE regarding student achievement and results in Providence and the evidence gathered in the Face-to-Face Meetings demonstrate that Providence (PSD, Board, and PTU) must collectively build on what is working well and must collectively recognize that not all structures in the district are working effectively to improve student results. A disciplined focus must be brought to changing those structures in schools that are not supportive of meeting student learning needs.

RIDE will work closely with the PSD, Board, and PTU to ensure that the necessary changes are made during this Progressive Support and Intervention cycle to deliver the required improvement in student achievement.

### **RIDE Analysis of the Three Comprehensive High Schools**

#### ***Mount Pleasant High School***

Mount Pleasant High School has been actively engaged in a redesign process. State assessment results indicate that although low performing, the school is positioned to improve student achievement. In RIDE analyses of the four years of state assessment data used to categorize schools, Mount Pleasant High School met five improvement targets in English-language arts and one in mathematics. Students test participation improved as well. In English-language arts, student "no scores" decreased from 23 to 12 percent. In mathematics, "no scores" decreased from 27 to 16 percent.

Additional information gleaned from the Face-to-Face Meeting indicates that the attendance rate at Mount Pleasant is the best among the three comprehensive high schools, hovering around 85%. The dropout rate is approximately 30%. The school has a high suspension rate and holds, on the average, 50-75 students for detention per day. Although staff viewed the suspension number as high and identified this as an area for improvement, it was made clear that most

suspensions are for truancy infractions and are served in-house. The Mount Pleasant participants reported that the school is safer than before; students are more respectful and parents are appreciative of the enforcement of disciplinary standards.

With regard to program, Mount Pleasant representatives emphasized that the number one priority has been instruction and that progress is varied in this realm. In English-language arts, rubrics, expectations and student work are posted throughout the building. The school has launched a literacy pilot, and although too early to tell, staff predicts the program will have a substantial impact on future English-language arts test scores. This "disciplinary literacy pilot" is intended to emphasize literacy instruction across the subject area disciplines.

Despite improvement in English-language arts, mathematics is moving much more slowly. The principal reported that teachers need training in connecting instruction to standards.

Mount Pleasant has worked diligently in an attempt to reach *all* students. "Project Success" is a computer-based credit recovery program in which a credit recovery manager works with students who are failing and have a history of retention. The school holds an 8<sup>th</sup> grade summer Ramp-Up Program and all students are invited. Last year about 150 students attended, which resulted in a positive cohort of students for the following September. All 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes provide inclusionary instruction for students with special needs. The school also has a summer program to support 9<sup>th</sup> grade students with special needs who are not passing.

Personalization efforts are underway. The principal described student teaming as good, particularly at the 9th grade level, where students know they have support and cannot fall through the cracks. There are, however, no individualized plans for students. Regarding student well being, the principal believes that the greatest weakness in the school is the lack of a student voice. She further expressed the need for more leadership opportunities for the students. The principal did not know specifically how the school's stringent disciplinary policies impacted interest in student leadership, but noted that a waiting list of 647 students would seem to point to a positive school climate overall. Regarding the parent connection, Mount Pleasant holds regular parent meetings. Although approximately 25-50 parents regularly attend, parent participation could be vastly improved.

Professional development and planning are frequent and are aligned with instructional materials. At the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level, teachers meet 1 hour per day. Four new teachers had to be hired to accommodate this teaming initiative. Teaming at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade is pure and 10<sup>th</sup> grade teaming is mid-implementation. While this collaborative teacher structure has been a positive force for

instructional improvement, teachers school-wide are not teamed and do not have common meeting time.

Most professional development permeates through a team of lead teachers who attend professional development seminars and bring their expertise back to school staff. Many of the teachers are involved in Course 1 New Standards training. This summer, about 20 teachers will be trained in Disciplinary Literacy. In addition, faculty meetings are held every two weeks and some of the teacher training occurs at these meetings.

Teacher certification problems are reported to have been a constant at Mount Pleasant, particularly in mathematics and science. The school and district together sought RIDE's assistance in areas of recruitment, retention and development.

The Commissioner summarized: There is a program at Mount Pleasant and the school is instituting structures that are stabilizing. The culture of the school is safe and secure. Although in need of improvement, the parent and personalization pieces are on the subjects of focused attention.

### ***Progressive Support and Intervention Requirements for Mount Pleasant High School***

Issues of concern at Mount Pleasant include:

- Ability to develop authentic teaming beyond the ninth grade (spread this into 10<sup>th</sup> and beyond);
- Broad application of the Disciplinary Literacy work, which is now in the pilot stage;
- Accountability for mathematics instruction. There is a need for more supervision of instruction in the area of mathematics and explicit connection of mathematics instruction to the standards.
- Half of the students who fail courses are not having attendance problems. This means these students are present but not learning.
- There are teacher shortages in mathematics and science.

Mount Pleasant is proceeding toward improvement of student results. However RIDE requires that Mount Pleasant address its areas of concern by revising its school improvement plan (as part of the POP Planning process and overall high school redesign effort) to specifically address the five concerns listed in this section and set forth specific strategies with timelines for implementation.



### ***Central High School***

RIDE's analysis of the four years of state assessment data used to categorize schools reveals that Central High School met two improvement targets in English-language arts and one in Rhode Island Writing. Test participation rates increased by more than ten percentage points for every test. Attendance rates are up and suspensions have declined dramatically. The failure rate in core academic areas has been cut in half. With regard to performance, the school expressed the need for RIDE's help in correlating 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade test scores. Without this kind of tracking, it is difficult to assess program viability and to think strategically about program changes.

Central emphasizes small learning communities and has begun these structural changes at the ninth grade level. The school has worked on Mathematics curriculum and the standardization of textbooks. Curriculum alignment was discussed as a strength. Instructional facilitators are dissecting instruction and data and using it to inform instructional efforts.

The ninth grade was reported to be running smoothly. Teachers look at student work, and instructional assessment has improved. There are 7 adults for each 100 students. Interim assessments, according to the principal, although used often at the elementary level, are not used at the high school level. She acknowledged that the school must improve its methods of interim student evaluation.

Support programs are on the increase at Central High School. With Gates Foundation funding, Central has established a make-up school. Here students can average their new Algebra or English grade into the previous failing grade to bring up their average and be promoted. The school has a credit recovery program for repeat retention students, so that students can break the cycle of failure. There is a PLATO (computer-based instruction) lab for 16-18 year old students entering the ninth grade. The strength of support programs at Central, however, is not reported to have translated into improved parent connections. Staff acknowledged this weakness and agreed with the need to develop a strategy that accounts for the school's high mobility (55%) and special education (30%) rates.

Professional development for teachers was reported to occur after school and is paid for using Article 31 funds. Predictably, the staff reports that buy-in to the reform efforts ranges from acceptance to ambivalence. The majority of training, however, is reported to have positively impacted principals, assistant principals, instructional facilitators and lead teams. Union representation commented that teacher feedback on reform has been positive at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level, but less so at the higher grades.

Central High School's representatives concluded with the recognition that there is still much to do. Among the barriers are money, improved assessment

instruments and greater assessment flexibility. District officials added that high schools require assistance in recapturing Title 1 funding and reported that work is underway with RIDE to accomplish this.

### ***Progressive Support and Intervention Requirements for Central High School***

There is much work still to be done at Central High School including:

- Implementation of teaming at grade 10 and beyond;
- Parent participation needs to be improved and strategies are being examined to accomplish this;
- There is a shortage of certified mathematics teachers.

While Central High School has made remarkable progress on establishing conditions of readiness for improvement of student learning results, the Central High School school improvement plan is to be updated and submitted to the Commissioner to reflect the school improvement needs as described at the Face-to-Face Meeting.

### ***Hope High School***

RIDE recognizes that the Hope High School community has been actively engaged in a redesign process, and applauds those efforts. The efforts extend over several years. Hope High School has taken on the most ambitious restructuring plan of any Providence comprehensive high school, seeking to reorganize all four grades into “houses” at the school this past year. While the energy and ambition of this planning effort must be applauded, the evidence regarding student results must be the primary focus of the follow up to the Face-to-Face Meeting. Student results at Hope High School require that we direct changes at Hope High School in the coming year. Hope High School emerges from our analysis as dramatically different from the other comprehensive high schools in Providence, which have been discussed more fully above. Thus, the requirements for change at Hope High School are also different from those required for the other comprehensive high schools.

In RIDE analysis of the four years of state assessment data used to categorize schools, Hope High School met no improvement targets in English-language arts and experienced a decline in student performance in all four subtests (Basic Reading, Reading Analysis and Interpretation, Writing Effectiveness, and Writing Conventions). The percentage of proficient students in all areas of English-language arts is expressed in single digits and shows a declining trend in most areas. Similarly, in the state mathematics assessments there were declines over the four years in all three subtests (Skills, Concepts, and Problem Solving), culminating with 3 percent or less of the school's students reaching the level of proficiency in any aspect of the assessments in 2001. Finally, the percentage of

students performing in the lowest categories of achievement increased in all key areas during the four-year period.

Not only are students not demonstrating proficiency at Hope High School, Hope High School has had a declining participation rate in the state assessments in the 1999, 2000, and 2001 school years. We learned in the Face-to-Face Meeting that the faculty and administration at Hope High School went to great lengths to increase the participation rate in the 2002 assessments, and we are confident that those efforts will show significant progress. However, in the 2001 assessments, student participation reached an all-time low, with barely a quarter of the students participating in the English language arts assessments and just over a third participating in the mathematics assessments. These student-performance results cannot be permitted to continue. As discussed above these trends are dramatically different from even those of the other comprehensive high schools in Providence.

### ***Progressive Support and Intervention Requirements for Hope High School***

RIDE applauds and supports the PSD decision to install Nancy Mullen as the new principal at Hope High School. The evidence of progress at Mount Pleasant High School, discussed more fully above, bodes well for positive change that Principal Mullen may lead at Hope High School.

The installation of a new principal alone cannot, however, be expected to yield the necessary results in the desired time frame. Therefore, based on the student results discussed above, and pursuant to the Commissioner's authorities in R.I.G.L. 16-7.1-5 "Intervention and Support for Failing Schools" as well as the authorities of the Commissioner under Title XVI generally to intervene in schools on behalf of students, RIDE is requiring that the entire leadership team be immediately reconstituted at Hope High School. The PSD is instructed to work with Principal Mullen to select building administrators to replace the administrators currently at the school. It is RIDE's expectation that these new administrators will become the administrative heads of the three to four small learning communities already envisioned in the Hope High School redesign.

RIDE directs that the school continue on the tasks it has already begun with the development of three to four small learning communities. The RIDE intervention at Hope High School is results-based. The PSD, Board, and PTU are collectively responsible to deliver the required outcome of three to four site-based managed, separately functioning, small learning communities at Hope High School that are up and running in September 2003. The plan for these site-based managed small learning communities, with all local approvals in place, must be submitted to the Commissioner for his approval no later than January 31, 2003. The fully approved plan must be put in place no later than September 2003.

RIDE requires student, family, and community participation in the Hope High School redesign process, consistent with the district's current initiative with the Rhode Island Children's Crusade to involve students and the community in high school change.

Because faculty are a necessary part of the intensive redesign process, the PSD, Board, and PTU are collectively responsible for ensuring that Hope High School faculty have a meaningful opportunity to participate in the redesign process. RIDE expects faculty members who participate in the process to attend meetings at least twice monthly outside the context of the school day. The PSD, Board, and PTU are collectively responsible for creating mechanisms that will ensure that this occurs.

Similarly, because of the lack of improvement in student performance on the state assessments and lack of evidence of a systematic approach to ensuring that standards-based instruction is occurring across environments at Hope High School, RIDE expects the PSD, Board, and PTU to work together to ensure that all administrators and faculty at Hope High School are provided the opportunity to, and strongly encouraged to, participate in at least 20 hours of professional development, outside the context of the school day, during the 2002-2003 school year. This expectation must be met prior to the implementation of the whole-school redesign effective September 2003 because the instructional needs of students currently enrolled in the school must be immediately addressed. This professional development shall be focused on standards-based instruction during the 2002-2003 school year. In the event that this expectation for professional development is one that some faculty members do not feel they can accommodate during the 2002-2003 school year, the PSD, Board, and PTU are expected to work together to create a mechanism that would permit faculty who cannot meaningfully participate in the professional development to seek another teaching assignment.

The Commissioner will review and approve a plan for the implementation of the small learning communities as site-based managed schools during February 2003. This plan shall include specific elements including but not limited to:

- Provisions that ensure that those teachers who choose to remain at Hope High School for the implementation of the plan in the 2003-2004 school year will do so based on acceptance of the specific elements of the design of the small learning community in which they will be teaching.
- A mechanism to enable willing teachers to remain at Hope High School and within their small learning community for the 2003-2004 school year.
- Mechanisms to provide flexibility in scheduling of students and teachers so that there can be genuine grade level "teacher teams" in each of the small learning communities.

- Mechanisms to ensure that teachers participate in the necessary professional development to support best practices in standards-based instruction.
- Three to four small learning communities with each such learning community having integrity as a site-based managed unit.

Representatives of the RIDE Providence Progressive Support and Intervention Team will meet with representatives of PSD, Board, PTU and the Hope High School redesign team (and its small learning community specific subgroups) on a regular basis throughout the 2002-2003 school year and during the implementation phase (2003-2004) as needed.

Should the PSD, Board, and PTU be unable to collectively meet the requirements set forth in this Face-to-Face report, based upon the review of progress by the RIDE during regular meetings held during the 2002-2003 school year, the Commissioner will implement the requirements through the authorities granted him under Title XVI.

This Face-to-Face report will be followed by additional reports focusing on the middle and elementary schools as Phase III of the Face-to-Face Meeting process in Providence is conducted and concluded.